MEMO

DATE: October 10, 2005

TO: Community, Economic and Human Development Committee

FROM: Joseph Carreras, Lead Planner, Tel. 213.236.1856, Carreras@scag.ca.gov

RE: Mixed Use Centers in the South Bay: How do they Function and Do they Change Travel Demand?

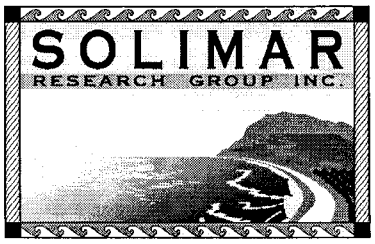
Summary:

The goal of this report is to obtain more empirical knowledge about the South Bay specifically – not by advocating a different development pattern or assuming that a different pattern will change people's travel patterns, but by *examining mixed-use centers that already exist in the South Bay* and *determining whether travel behavior in those centers differs from travel behavior elsewhere in the South Bay.*

Background:

The full report with appendices is available on-line at:
http://www.southbaycities.org/pdfs/centers_study/South%20Bay%20Report.pdf

A ten page executive summary is attached.



Mixed-Use Centers In The South Bay: How Do They Function And Do They Change Travel Demand?

A Report to the South Bay Cities Council of Governments

From Solimar Research Group

June 30, 2005

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Executive Summary

ES-1: Introduction

After more than a century of rapid suburban growth, the South Bay subregion is now almost completely built out. More than 1 million people live in the South Bay, and another 500,000 people work here every day. Virtually no undeveloped land remains in the South Bay, but forecasts from the Southern California Association of Governments suggest that the subregion will add another 170,000 residents and 80,000 jobs by 2025. Most of this additional growth is expected to come by recycling and intensifying land in older shopping centers and arterial corridors with the use of mixed-use development.

The goal of this report is to obtain more empirical knowledge about the South Bay specifically – not by advocating a different development pattern or assuming that a different pattern will change people's travel patterns, but by *examining mixed-use centers that already exist in the South Bay* and *determining whether travel behavior in those centers differs from travel behavior elsewhere in the South Bay.*

In approaching this project, the Solimar team undertook a multi-faceted effort in conjunction with the COG and the Livable Communities Working Group. The work effort was divided into four overall components which together provide a vivid and useful

picture of mixed-use centers and the housing opportunities within them. These four components were:

1. *Characterization of the South Bay's Urban Form and Selection of Study Areas*

2. *Detailed GIS Analysis and Field Survey of the Three Centers*

3. *Understanding of Travel Behavior in the Centers and in a Control Area*

4. *Possible Design Improvements and Transportation Alternatives Within the Centers*

ES-2 The South Bay's Urban Form

The South Bay is similar to many other older suburban areas in the Los Angeles area in the sense that it grew rapidly in the postwar era and is now almost out of raw land. However, more than many other older suburbs – northern Orange County, for example – the South Bay's development pattern was fixed in part prior to World War II.

Many of the South Bay's older towns were originally developed between 1887 (the year of L.A.'s first real estate boom) and World War I, when Los Angeles's interurban and streetcar system were developed. In the postwar era, the South Bay developed in a suburban pattern similar to other growing areas in Southern California. The South Bay developed a critical mass of employment in certain critical industries, especially aerospace and automobiles, with jobs concentrated in many employment centers that were developed in conjunction with adjacent residential areas. Meanwhile, new single-family subdivisions were developed on the farmland in between the older town centers.

The result of this history is that the South Bay's urban form, while predominantly suburban in nature, is more varied that the form of suburban areas that developed entirely during one era such as north Orange County, which was developed predominantly during the 1950s, or the Santa Clarita Valley, which was developed mostly during the 1970s and '80s.

This variation has blessed the South Bay with a large number of village-scale town centers, as well as a large number of arterial strips and intersections. Generally speaking, these have not evolved into large regional entertainment or employment centers; rather, they have tended to remain local centers. But they do represent a significant and varied set of opportunities on which the next generation of development in the South Bay may be built – opportunities that could help to implement the 2% strategy.

ES-3 Selecting The Mixed-Use Centers to Study

Given the scattered landscape of both housing and jobs, we concluded that the best way to identify possible mixed-use centers is to show where high-density job centers and high-

density residential neighborhoods overlap. The locations where this overlap occurs number more than 70 of these "jobs-housing" areas. Most are small in area and they are scattered across the subregion.

Seeking to make more sense of this data, we selected 19 (areas that had either (1) several green areas) or (2) green areas surrounded by blue and yellow areas). We later added two more centers that did not exactly fit our parameters but seemed to be potentially significant from a subregional perspective (Cal State Dominguez Hills and Douglass Green Line Stop), giving us a total of 21.

We ranked each of the 21 areas in each category and then aggregated the rankings (without weighting the different factors).

After evaluating the 21 centers it was clear that many would not serve as effective candidates for the final three that will be analyzed in detail as part of this study. We found that in many cases, an area might appear to be a center in statistical terms, but it did not contain a dense and accessible mix of uses.

In cutting the field to seven, we were left with four beach communities and three older downtowns, all of which were initially developed prior to the postwar suburban era. Unfortunately, one consequence of this analysis was that many areas with ethnic and income diversity, especially those in inland cities, were dropped. In general, these populations are located in strip-commercial areas developed during the suburban era.

In the second round, we used Census Sample Level 3 data to obtain a more fine-grained understanding of demographics, housing, transportation, and economic patterns. In consultation with the COG and the COG's Livable Communities Working Group, we selected the following three centers for in-depth analysis:

1. Downtown Inglewood, a more traditional "downtown" and also the only center with a large non-white population;
2. Downtown Torrance, which had a large employment base adjacent to a commercial core and a residential area with a variety of housing types; and
3. Riviera Village, located mostly in Redondo Beach but partly in Torrance, which appeared to be the most "neighborhood-oriented" of the four beach communities.

ES-4: Analysis of the Three Mixed-Use Centers

Each of the three study areas reflected a different kind of center with its own lessons for mixed-use development in the South Bay and Southern California. All have roots in Los Angeles's vast interurban system of the early 20th Century, which was often used to promote real estate development in undeveloped areas, although the actual development of Riviera Village took place much later than the other areas and was never really a "transit village".

Downtown Inglewood represents what might best be described as an ***arterial downtown.*** Its focal point is the intersection of two arterial streets, Manchester Boulevard and La Brea Boulevard, which carry considerable through traffic.

Riviera Village represents more of a *classic village*, with a neighborhood-oriented commercial core surrounded by a variety of residential neighborhoods with different densities.

Downtown Torrance represents a classic Los Angeles *planned industrial suburb*, with employment centers, a commercial core, and residential areas all located in close proximity to one another.

For analytical purposes we divided all three centers into an inner area (60 to 100 acres) and an outer area (200 to 600 acres). The inner area included the commercial core; the outer area included a variety of residential and employment areas. For the purposes of the pedestrian study, a strip-oriented "control area" in the vicinity of Pacific Coast Highway and Hawthorne Boulevard was selected.

Demographic Characteristics: Inglewood is mostly African-American; Riviera Village is mostly white; and while Torrance is also mostly white there is a significant Asian and Hispanic population. All have small household sizes (usually 2.0 persons per household and below), although household size in outer Inglewood was 2.6, suggesting the presence of many families.

The population and housing patterns are also different from center to center. In all three cases, the inner boundary – representing a radius of approximately ¼ mile from the centerpoint of the area – is mostly a business and commercial center, but the presence of housing and population varies.

The three centers differ significantly in the more detailed demographic characteristics that were derived from the Census sample data, which is drawn from slightly different boundaries than the study area boundaries. Not surprisingly, Riviera Village is more affluent than the county as a whole, while Inglewood is well below the average and Torrance is fairly close to the average, skewing slightly above it. All three areas are below the county average in using alternative transportation modes to get to work.

Economic Characteristics: Both Inglewood and Torrance have lots of jobs and economic activity in the outer areas – the areas located from ¼ to ½ mile away from the core. As was noted above, in Inglewood this activity is driven largely by the medical sector, especially Daniel Freeman Hospital, whereas in Torrance it is driven mostly by Honda. Riviera Village has no jobs base to speak out in the outer area except from retail and service businesses along Pacific Coast Highway.

Because of their large business bases, Inglewood and Torrance have very large sales volumes in the outer area compared to the inner area. Only Riviera Village, with its strong business base in the core and its residential areas on the outskirts, has more business activity in the inner area than in the outer area.

All three centers have almost a full complement of neighborhood services, especially in the area of personal care shops, medical and dental offices, and restaurants. However, it is clear that in almost all cases these neighborhood businesses depend on a larger market area for survival.

Urban Design Characteristics: Downtown Inglewood comes the closest to being a citywide center due to the government center and transit center. Riviera Village and Torrance are truly "urban villages" in the grid urban fabric of the South Bay. Both of these places have a unique way of distinguishing themselves in terms of identity and use. Downtown Inglewood follows a different model, namely retaining the urban grid and adapting this to create uniqueness and identity.

Riviera Village has the strongest adjoining residential neighborhoods. In Torrance, provision of additional residential uses in the midst of downtown is a valuable addition to build in a market for local goods and services. As a neighborhood center, Riviera Village is not bounded by regional connecting streets and therefore has a better integration with its surrounding residential neighborhoods.

As urban villages, Riviera Village and Old Town, Torrance utilize urban design concepts that focus attention inward and away from the outside landscape. This is very effective to maintaining a sense of identity and place. Downtown Inglewood has a much harder job doing this largely due to its grid character, which is by definition one that expands views and perceptions outward.

Pedestrian Activity : Overall, however, Torrance and Inglewood - the two centers with large employment bases adjacent - have more pedestrian activity on weekdays, whereas Riviera Village - the center surrounded by residential areas - has more pedestrian activity on weekends. The most startling result, however, is the contrast between pedestrian activity in the three centers and pedestrian activity in the control area around PCH and Hawthorne. In the three centers, weekday pedestrian activity was 6 to 12 times greater in the centers than in the control area.

ES-5: Surveys of Travel Behavior

Seeking to learn more about travel behavior directly from these "center users," we undertook three separate surveys - one each for residents, employees, and visitors - and a series of focus groups (one in each center).

The resident survey and the employee survey were extensive surveys that sought "travel diary" information as well as demographic information about the respondents. The visitor survey was a one-page document with only nine questions so that visitors could fill it out "on the fly" when approached by Solimar's field survey team. We received almost 700 valid responses on the resident survey, as well as approximately 120 responses for the employee survey and approximately 270 responses for the visitor survey.

Based on this research, we reached six conclusions

1. People who live and work near mixed-use centers visit those centers frequently, and they walk more and drive less when they do so.

2. Living near a mixed-use center seems to have little effect on commute mode, although the presence of major employment may make a minor difference.

3. The design and layout of the center may play some role in travel behavior

4. Travel behavior around the centers is extremely sensitive to the presence or absence of certain types of businesses, and trips to the center would increase if certain types of businesses or activities were added.

5. It is unclear what type of transportation alternatives would be attractive to people who live or work near the centers, but this area would benefit from further study.

6. If properly designed and managed, mixed-use centers may reduce overall vehicle trips.

ES-6: Conclusions

Four Major Conclusions

Based on all of the research, including the surveys of residents, employees, and visitors, we can state the following conclusions with some confidence:

1. *People who live or work near a mixed-use center will travel to that center more frequently.*

2. *People who live or work near a mixed-use center are more likely to walk to the center rather than drive.*

3. *People who live near mixed-use centers are likely to take fewer trips overall and fewer auto trips in particular.*

4. *The centers appear to have more potential to minimize traffic on non-work trips than on commuting trips.*

These conclusions suggest that more housing (and, indeed, more jobs) could be added to mixed-use centers in the South Bay in a way that might create less overall travel demand – and therefore less travel impact – than if that housing were added in other locations.

It is important not to overstate this conclusion. Based on current travel behavior, it is unlikely that adding more housing in mixed-use centers would lessen rush-hour auto commuting, either on the arterial highways or on the freeways. Furthermore, these results would suggest that concentrating housing in the centers would not decrease traffic in those centers; obvious, traffic would increase over current levels.

But it seems very likely that adding more housing to mixed-use centers would decrease overall travel than if that housing were located elsewhere, and would decrease auto traffic associated with off-work personal trips. It also seems likely that adding more jobs to the mixed-use centers would decrease auto trips during the workday for meals and personal errands than would be the case if those jobs were located far from these centers.

However, our research also suggests that simply adding new housing (or new jobs) in a concentrate fashion will not create the desired outcome unless other factors are taken into account. Simply put, if the South Bay cities are going to absorb more housing and more jobs in older arterial strip areas and shopping centers, they must pay attention to three other factors in making those centers work:

1. The physical design of the centers.

2. The mix of businesses and activities within the center.

3. Neighborhood-level transportation alternatives to driving and walking.